

Austria to shut non-essential shops to fight virus

March 13 2020

Austria on Friday tightened its coronavirus response by announcing the closure of non-essential retail businesses, locking down two western communities and suspending flights to France, Spain and Switzerland.

A day after revealing its first virus-related death, Vienna said that non-essential retail businesses must be shuttered from Monday and that cafes and restaurants would shut every day at 3 pm (1400 GMT) in an attempt to limit the spread of the disease.

"From Monday, we must cut back our social lives to a minimum," said Chancellor Sebastian Kurz, adding that food stores, chemists, banks and post offices would stay open as Austria did "whatever is necessary" to limit transmission.

A 15-day lockdown, Austria's first since the start of virus scare, will apply to two communes in the western Tyrol region—including the popular ski resort of St. Anton am Arlberg—following a spate of infections near the Italian border.

Three days after suspending flights and trains from Italy, to date Europe's worst affected country, Austria extended the flight ban to France, Spain and Switzerland from Monday.

Kurz described the three nations as "countries in which the novel [coronavirus](#) is spreading particularly quickly."

Across the border, neighbour Italy—where at least 1,000 people have died to date and where the entire country was Tuesday placed on lockdown—the government on Thursday imposed the closure of restaurants, bars and almost all shops except food stores and pharmacies.

Austrian media reported meanwhile that a March 27 friendly international football match away to Wales had been called off while a Vienna friendly is set to go ahead but in an empty stadium.

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